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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: OBAMA FOREIGN POLICY; ALBA SUMMIT; THE
FIGHT ON DRUG TRAFFICKING; 10/19/09 BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international opinion pieces are related to President Obama's policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan; the outcome of the ALBA summit, which was held in Cochabamba, Bolivia; and the evolution of drug cartels during the last 30 years.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "The doubt"

Left-of-center "Pagina 12's" international columnist Santiago O'Donnell writes (10/18), "(Obama) waited the whole week and he will continue doing so and he will let the doubt grow - what to do in Afghanistan? Obviously enough, the commander-in-chief of the invading power and brand-new Nobel Peace Prize winner has a plan. This is the conflict that will define his presidency.

"According to the 'Time' magazine, he will make a decision on this in late November...

"The problem is that regardless of what Obama will do he cannot do much. He cannot escape some realities. Democrats who claimed the withdrawal of troops from Iraq have supported the war from scratch. Allied countries, which do not want to send more troops, do not support an immediate withdrawal or anything of the kind either.

"... In addition to the emotional side, what public opinion questions is the central premise of the mission - that it is necessary to defeat the Afghan Taliban regime to protect the US from terrorist attacks.

"Now, the priority is to consolidate the Pakistani regime while taking care of its nuclear arsenal. This is why the US mass media speak of 'the Af-Pak war.' This is why Obama cannot leave Afghanistan just like he is doing in Iraq.

"Obama already knows what he will do. So do the people in his entourage. First and foremost, he will wait, open the debate, and tackle the health care reform (his main domestic initiative).

"After that, according to columnist Joe Klein, Obama will accept the request from his military chief in Afghanistan and send him the nearly 40,000 troop he asked for, although he will say those troops will be used to train the Afghan army, which of course is not true.

"While the support for the war slumps and corpses pile up, Obama goes ahead.

"(He goes ahead) with the 9/11 specter and with the votes which supported his proposal to withdraw from Iraq and win the war in Afghanistan. This is why the Nobel Peace Prize winner will have to wait. This is why he doubts."

- "Chavez' petro-dollars are used to oppose Washington"

Matias Marini, international columnist of centrist "Perfil" newspaper, comments (10/18), "Yesterday, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez charged against the US: 'the US wants to turn Colombia into the Israel of Latin America.' Chavez again talked about the US-Colombian agreement, which is aimed at performing joint military exercises. Chavez launched his critical statement in front of a friendly audience, the presidents of the Bolivarian Alliance for America (ALBA), which met yesterday in Bolivia for the seventh time. Chavez said: 'The empire's wish is a threat against all of us.' He pressured to create a Defense Council among the nine ALBA nations...

"... Chavez now intends to add a military profile to his strong energy expansion in Latin America through Petrocaribe, the Chavez-led oil alliance established among some Caribbean countries.

"The initiative allows Chavez's allied Caribbean nations to purchase Venezuela's subsidized oil under preferential payment terms...

"As per the Petrocaribe agreement, Venezuela provides oil supply to countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Guyana, Honduras (before the coup d'etat), Jamaica and Surinam...

"It is not the first time the Venezuelan president leads the anti-US feeling in the region. In 2005, during the Mar del Plata Fourth SOA, Chavez waged a media battle to defeat the FTAA initiative.

"Then, it was Republican George W. Bush who had to backtrack on the FTAA initiative due to the Bolivarian offensive in Argentina, which was supported by former Argentine President Nestor Kirchner."

- "Drug trafficking shows a new face"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an opinion piece by Cesar Gonzalez-Calero, who writes (10/17), "Chameleonic, drug cartels have adapted to current times and they have become major crime multinational corporations in a globalized world. New routes to skip border controls; sophisticated means of transportation; new markets; transnational alliances; diverse illegal businesses; secured funds in tax havens... Drug trafficking (more violent, segmented and bold than ever) has lost some battles but it is still winning the war.

"... In spite of the high expenditures incurred in the fight on drug trafficking (some 100 billion dollars per year), cartels do not seem to have been affected too much. They have simply reinvented themselves. The producer-to-consumer vertical organization has disappeared to become what Ivan Briscoe, researcher at a Spanish think tank (Fundacion for International Relations and foreign Dialogue), terms 'baby cartels,' which relentlessly fight in search of new markets.

"... The experts consulted (except Amado Philip, from the UN) agree that 30 years of war against drug traffickers have been unsuccessful.. The UN believes the governments should implement the already existent international agreements related to the struggle against organized crime, while some independent experts think some other kinds of measures should be taken, such as the progressive decriminalization of soft drugs, the implementation of harm reduction policies for both producers and consumers, and a determined governmental action against tax havens."

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MARTINEZ